

Roots of CDC

History

The Public Health Service established the Communicable Disease Center (CDC) in 1946 to work on malaria, typhus, and other infectious diseases. The center was located in Atlanta (rather than Washington, DC) because the South was the area of the country with the most malaria transmission. In the next 60 years, minor changes were made to the name (Center for Disease Control, Centers for Disease Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), but the initials, CDC, have remained the same.

Through the years, CDC's work has expanded to include all infectious diseases, as well as occupational health, toxic chemicals, injury, chronic diseases, health statistics, and birth defects. Reporting today to the Department of Health and Human Services and working in collaboration with public health partners, CDC tirelessly leads the fight against known, new, and emerging diseases around the globe. At the same time, CDC leads prevention efforts to reduce the burden of preventable and chronic diseases.

Historic Objects

U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE SEAL



The PHS seal was originally designed in the 1870s by John Maynard Woodworth, the first Supervising Surgeon (known today as the Surgeon General) of the [Marine Hospital Service](#), the forerunner of the PHS.

The seal features a caduceus, the symbol of medicine, crossed with a fouled anchor, signifying a seaman in distress. The date 1798 refers to the year that [the Marine Hospital Service](#) was established.

[CDC Today](#)

Stories From The Archives

1902: U.S. Public Health Service



The 1902: Public Health Service (PHS)

Federal public health programs grew out of the Marine Hospital Service (MHS), established in 1798 to provide healthcare to merchant seamen. The responsibilities of MHS expanded in the 19th century to include the medical inspection of immigrants, the supervision of national quarantine, the prevention of the interstate spread of disease, and prevention and control of diseases such as yellow fever, cholera, and smallpox.

MHS was renamed the Public Health and Marine Hospital Service in 1902, and then the Public Health Service in 1912 to reflect its broadened scope and increased responsibilities. The roots of CDC, as well as a number of other federal agencies in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), lie in the historic work of PHS.

1942-1946 MCWA to CDC



1942: MALARIA CONTROL IN WAR AREAS (MCWA)

What was to become CDC began in World War II-a 1949 CDC press release refers to CDC as "strictly a war baby grown up." Launched in 1942, the Public Health Service's Malaria Control in War Areas worked to protect new soldiers from mosquitoes that could infect them during basic training in the American Southeast-malaria was still prevalent in the United States at that time. Headquartered in Atlanta, MCWA soon added the control of rats-carriers of typhus-to its mission.

1946: COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CENTER

After World war II ended, Dr. Joseph W. Mountain of the Public Health Service's Bureau of State Services envisioned an agency that could support state and local health units investigating the nation's health through local measures. Opening on July 1, 1946, in Atlanta, the Communicable Disease Center (CDC) built upon the work of MCWA. CDC's first offices were housed downtown in the Volunteer Building on [Luckie and Broad Streets](#), with fewer than 400 employees.

A generous 1947 land grant from Emory University, made at the request of Robert W. Woodruff, board chairman of Coca-Cola, made the CDC campus on Clifton Road possible. A token payment of \$10 was paid by CDC employees, who each contributed ten cents. Field stations and laboratories were expanded and diversified, and training of employees became an immediate task. The new institution would expand to include all communicable diseases, and would be servant of the states, providing practical advice whenever needed.